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THE EXPERTS' ROUNDTABLE ON CANADA'S NORTHERN FOREIGN POLICY

-Summary Report-

Prepared by John Lamb

SUMMARY REPORT FROM THE EXPERTS' ROUNDTABLE ON CANADA'S NORTHERN FOREIGN POLICY

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This is a summary report from the Experts' Roundtable convened in Ottawa by the Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs, in cooperation with the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, on December 16, 1998. It was attended by over 60 invited Canadian authorities on various aspects of Canada's north or Canada's northern foreign relations. About one-third of the participants were from Canada's north. The objective of the Roundtable was to involve these experts in the consultative process now underway in connection with the development of a new northern foreign policy for Canada.

This summary report sets out the major insights or ideas developed in the four working group sessions at the Roundtable. It is derived from notes taken by the rapporteurs. The ideas presented here will be taken into account as the process of elaborating a new northern foreign policy proceeds over the coming months.

OVERALL SHAPE OF THE NEW POLICY

- the policy paper should begin with a very substantial introduction, providing the context, purpose, limitations, and so on, of the new policy.

- the introduction should include a discussion of the growing role of actors other than the federal government in Canada's international relations generally, and of the evolution the federal government's role in foreign affairs is undergoing as a result (supported not least by both the limits on the federal government's resources and the growing assertiveness of other jurisdictions in the international realm). This should lead to a recognition that this pattern is evident in Canada's relations with the circumpolar world as well, pointing to limits on the federal government's role in Canada's northern foreign policy. An understanding of this serves to give focus to the federal government's new northern foreign policy.

- proceeding from this, the policy should serve at least four broad purposes:
    - to establish a coherent framework and a broadly supported set of achievable policy objectives to guide the federal government's activities in regard to the circumpolar north. In this connection, it should also provide a rational basis for seeking continued or expanded funding for northern projects;
    - to indicate those broad forms of support the federal government is prepared to make available for the rapidly expanding circumpolar activities being undertaken by others, including Canada's territorial and provincial governments, NGOs, corporations, land claims organizations, aboriginal governments, and so on;
    - to provide a basis for public accountability on federal government commitments connected with northern foreign policy (what it can and cannot be expected to do);
    - to communicate with Canadian stakeholders and the public and with foreign governments about Canada's northern foreign policy interests and intentions.

- the introduction should lay out both the international and domestic context for the new northern foreign policy, including the following issues:

  domestic context - review of major trends & issues in Canada's north;
  - demographic trends in Canada's north;
  - review of current domestic programs relevant to northern foreign policy;

  international context- review of circumpolar cooperation and agreements;
  - review of other Arctic countries' major interests & activities;
  - review of extra-regional activities & issues impacting on Arctic, including how international obligations (ie. NAFTA, WTO) impact on Canada's options in the north;
  - mention connections among northern peoples of Arctic countries

- the policy should frankly address the issue of Canadian leadership in circumpolar cooperation. In some areas (ie. Arctic Council), Canada has clearly exercised leadership. In others (ie. Arctic science), it has let its commitment and hence its leadership role, slide significantly. It needs to decide what kind of leadership role it wishes to and realistically can play.

- the introduction should therefore include a discussion of Canada's "place" in the circumpolar region. While generally Canadian foreign policy emphasizes multilateral cooperation out of a recognition of its limited power and resources, might its somewhat larger profile in the Arctic at least on certain issues enable it to act more unilaterally there, or at least to be more assertive or insistent? Might not the Arctic Council initiative be viewed in these terms? Might it be quite productive for Canada to set a strong tone in this new northern foreign policy, indicating forthrightly that it intends to determinedly pursue its interests in the Arctic.

- the policy should reflect and articulate the Canadian values that will inform the new northern foreign policy, including those reflected in Canada's overall foreign policy (ie. fostering civility, soft power).

- the policy should revolve around an overarching theme that gives expression to Canada's central aim in the Arctic and helps to convey this aim to others. Among those suggested were:
  - Canada is a trustee of one of the world's most important natural resources;
  - Canada wishes to foster a circumpolar community based on civility;
  - the security of the Arctic environment is a key to the security of the Earth;
  - Canada's global role in the next century will be influenced by how it deals with the north;

- there was broad support for the broad approach advanced in the *Consultation Paper* to the effect that Canada's new northern foreign policy should be principally concerned with employing opportunities for circumpolar or even wider international cooperation to advance domestic, and especially northern, interests.

- however, the theme of advancing domestic interests should be complemented by the addition of a second major conceptual theme focusing on the building of partnerships with, or an alliance of, circumpolar states which can exercise leadership on common Arctic interests within the larger global community. This may involve Canada in activities that may not appear to have much direct relevance to domestic northern concerns, activities such as helping Russia, but that are key to building a circumpolar alliance.

- the policy's introduction should include a set of principles from which the themes, objectives and goals would stem. These principles need to be compatible with the principles contained in northern land claim agreements. Among these principles, prominence should be given to:
    - Arctic cooperation;
    - the four sustainability principles included in the Consultation Paper;
    - the sustainable development principles on p.102 of the Standing Committee's report;
    - to create conditions that enable northerners to go on living in the north (since 1982 it has been a constitutional right that people can live where they wish in Canada -- this provides a fundamental basis for sustainability in Canada's north).
    - meeting needs and aspirations at the local community level (sustainable communities);
    - recognition and preservation of Arctic cultural diversity;
    - investment in the future (ie. children and youth)
    - building capacity of northern aboriginal peoples;
    - foreign policy should entail co-management among stakeholders, in a spirit of partnership, equality and a sharing of responsibility.

- the introduction should discuss the evolving respective roles of the federal government, of the territorial/provincial governments, and of civil society (ie. corporations, NGOs, land claims organizations, and aboriginal governments) in Canada's northern foreign relations (see below re: "Activities of Other Foreign Policy Actors"). This discussion should provide a framework for delineating areas where the federal government can be expected to take the lead, and areas where others will have a major role to play. This does not mean prescribing a detailed division of labour on all the issues -- that would involve an ongoing process of discussion and negotiation in the implementation of the policy over time by the various players.

- the introduction should include examples of both past achievements, such as the AEPS and Arctic Council initiatives and the work of ICC Canada, and past failures. This should include a discussion of what led to successes, ie. national effort or international cooperation, or failures. This discussion should not be limited to the prominent successes (ie. Arctic Council), but draw on a wider range of Canada's northern activities.

- the introduction should make very clear why and how the policy relates to the real life concerns of northerners. The policy should seek to reflect (or "upload") Canada's local experience into the policy. This can be achieved partly through the use of examples to bring the document alive. *Gathering Strength* may be a good model for the policy, in the sense that it conveys real life, and relates policy principles and objectives to real life needs.

SPECIAL THEMATIC MESSAGES TO BE CONVEYED

- the introduction should discuss the place the north plays in Canada's national identity.
- the policy should reflect both the inclusion of the full agenda of issues and a clear recognition of the need to be practical in implementation. (see section on Priority-Setting.)
- the introduction should include a discussion of the evolving and broadening nature of security. No longer is security confined to military or legal concerns, but now must be looked at in terms of environmental, cultural, economic and demographic issues.
- the paper should deal more clearly with the funding required for implementing the new policy, indicating that it is understood that implementation will require additional resources and new partnerships.
- the introduction should make clear that the policy resulted from extensive consultations, particularly with northern governments, organizations and the public.
- there is a risk that expectations about the new policy, particularly among northerners, could exceed what is realistic, especially given the inevitable resource limitations. This risk needs to be managed.

PRESENTATIONAL ISSUES

- the goals should be integrated narratively into the discussion of objectives, rather than being set out in bullet form as a shopping list. In this way, they will convey the breadth of issues subsumed under each objective.
- the policy should be written with sufficient background and context that people from other countries can read it and understand the context and aims of Canada's northern foreign policy
- the language in the policy needs to be accessible for the public, particularly northerners.

RELATION TO CANADA'S OVERALL FOREIGN POLICY

- the new northern foreign policy should be properly integrated into Canada's overall foreign policy, rather than being a distinct and separate policy. Northern foreign policy should not be ghettoized within the larger ambit of Canadian foreign policy.
- cases can arise where existing foreign policies of Canada conflict with objectives that may seem appropriate for the northern foreign policy. An example is human rights, where northern concerns may not mesh with the approach taken in the UN. Reconciling these conflicts may sometimes be difficult, but needs to be tackled.

RELATION TO DOMESTIC NORTHERN POLICY

- the introduction to the policy needs to discuss the inter-relationship between domestic policy and northern foreign policy.

- while Canada doesn't have and isn't likely to establish a comprehensive domestic policy for the north, it does have a variety of statements (ie. Gathering Strength) that provide authoritative points of reference and contact for Canada's northern foreign policy.

- 20 years ago, the absence of a comprehensive domestic policy might have made articulation of a foreign policy impossible. Today, the line between domestic and foreign policy has blurred significantly, not only in Canada, but in all countries that are engaged globally. Issues that once were regarded as domestic now very often can only be tackled through a combination of domestic and external action. This new state of affairs should be recognized explicitly in the policy introduction. The absence of a comprehensive northern policy should therefore not be regarded or portrayed as a major weakness from the perspective of the foreign policy.

- the achievement of a northern foreign policy will in fact likely help focus and advance Canada's domestic northern policies in functional areas where it is most needed. This salutary inter-relationship should be recognized in the policy paper.

- the relationship between domestic and international northern policies is particularly important in the area of science and research. Rationalizing and strengthening Canada's own domestic polar science effort would enable it to play a better focused and more effective role in circumpolar science cooperation.

- in asserting through a new northern foreign policy its intent to foster certain values in the circumpolar north (ie. civility, human rights, environmental stewardship, etc.) Canada must have an eye to its own performance in these areas at home. The UN's recent report critical of Canada's domestic human rights record was noted in this regard.

POLICY THEMES – GENERAL

- the policy should state clearly that the themes are inter-related, like a tapestry.

- northern science needs to figure much more prominently in the policy, as a specific area where the federal government has a leading role to play. Thus, a new theme needs to be created, entitled something like "Scientific Research and Traditional Knowledge" to accommodate research activities that relate to several of the existing themes.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- the sustainable development and environmental protection themes set out in the *Consultation Paper* should be brought together into a single, integrated theme entitled Sustainable Development. Canada has adopted this integrated approach at the Arctic Council and elsewhere, and although some of our neighbours disagree with it, Canada's northern foreign policy must reflect what we actually believe. The introduction to this theme must make Canada's approach to sustainable development clear (not least to our neighbours).

- the discussion of sustainability should address the question: "sustainable for whom?" A key element of the answer to this question must be a commitment to policies that seek to enable northerners to continue living in the north.

- the sustainability discussion should address the experience of Inuit and other northern Aboriginal peoples in sustaining themselves for thousands of years.

- the discussion of sustainability, particularly in connection with the principle that people need to be enabled to continue living in the north as a constitutional right, should include the issue of population development, noting regional differences. It was, however, noted that no one wants to confront the subject of unsustainable population growth rates or the issue of control.

- greater emphasis should be given to the importance of strengthening communications capabilities across the circumpolar north.

- an objective should be added dealing with Canada's potential for exporting its ideas and experience in northern affairs. Many Canadians have unparalleled expertise on land claims settlement, in co-management, in maintaining open participatory policy development processes, in traditional ecological knowledge, and in "sustainability solutions." These intellectual commodities should be marketable in Russia and other Arctic countries through appropriate partnerships involving government, aboriginal organizations and others.

- the objective dealing with non-renewable resources needs to take account of certain important issues, particularly that concerning devolution of authority. The principle of subsidiarity should be applied and clearly articulated in the policy document. A goal under this objective should be to develop codes of conduct for corporations negotiating agreements on non-renewable resource development.

- a key international issue for the north is the fact that Canada stands to become a major player in the global diamond market. Currently marketing diamonds is through DeBeers. Russia has challenged this. How should Canada approach this? This issue should be discussed.

- the discussion of sustainable development should take note of the issue of creating an investment climate suitable to attract investment for the kinds of development desired.

- the challenges of having eco-tourism actually comply with sustainability principles, particularly of having it benefit the north need to be better reflected in the policy paper if eco-tourism is to be included in the paper.

- the goals under the Children and Youth objective need to be expanded.

- the goal concerned with ending international trade restrictions that harm Canada's northern industry based on sustainable utilization of wild furs, etc. is very important. Canada needs to work harder on this goal.

- consideration should be given to an Arctic Free Trade Zone, which could be linked to NAFTA and/or the FTA with the US. NAFTA is expanding southward, so why not northward?

- the discussion of environmental protection must take very prominent note of the fact that while changes elsewhere affect the Arctic, changes in the Arctic ecosystem can exert very important effects on the environment in other areas of the globe. This lays an important conceptual basis for Canada (and its circumpolar neighbours) to engage the global community strongly on Arctic issues.

- the discussion of environmental protection should take more prominent note of bi-polar issues, that is, issues where Arctic and Antarctic knowledge may be mutually reinforcing. This issue should also be taken account of in the new theme concerned with scientific research.

- the goal concerned with radioactive contamination in northern Russia should be strengthened by replacing "address the issue of" with "eliminate."

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RENEWAL

- education is of key importance to all aspects of sustainable communities and overall northern development, and should be given greater prominence.

- protection of northern indigenous languages needs greater emphasis.

CIRCUMPOLAR GOOD GOVERNANCE

- the introductions to the sections on good governance and bilateral relations should be woven into the overarching theme of building a circumpolar alliance (proposed above) to be discussed in the policy paper's overall introduction.

- the concept of civility to be discussed in the policy's introduction should be elaborated in the good governance section as a unifying theme for institution-building and fostering civil society.

- greater emphasis should be given to strengthening civil society across the circumpolar world as an explicit objective of Canada's northern foreign policy.

- the policy should also include as an objective the active encouragement of involvement by civil society in advancing Canada's northern foreign policy aims. This is not merely a matter of funding, but also includes actively engaging Canadian NGOs, particularly aboriginal organizations, to foster dialogue on northern issues and cooperation with NGOs from other countries (Arctic and non-Arctic).

- recognition should be given to the influence of "soft power" in the Arctic Council initiative, including both its origins and its accommodation of ongoing involvement by non-governmental Permanent Participants and Observers. This theme should be given prominence as a model for future development of circumpolar good governance.

- the policy should set out what Canada's hopes and concrete objectives are for the Arctic Council, IASC and other Arctic institutions it is involved in.

- the goal concerned with human rights needs re-thinking, including in regard to its consistency with Canada's positions on collective rights at the UN.

- the objectives and goals concerned with science should be moved from the good governance section to a new section focusing on scientific research and traditional knowledge.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

- knowledge, both scientific and traditional, should be portrayed as a fundamental basis for sound decision-making and action in the north, including in the area of resource management.

- the fact and consequences of funding cuts for northern research in recent years needs to be confronted in the context of Canada's capacity to meet its international commitments and to achieve its policy objectives in the area of northern science. Research is one key area in which the federal government should be supporting the work of other stakeholders. The Northern Contaminants Program was noted as a success story on domestic policy contributing positively to international action.

- science and traditional knowledge should figure as a key element of policy in several of the policy themes, including sustainable development, environmental protection and social and cultural renewal.

- the emerging experience and authority of the co-management regimes and the research capabilities attached to comprehensive land claims agreements should be included as an element of the approach to partnerships in the science and traditional knowledge area.

- a major objective should be for Canada to play a leading role in developing the northern scientific knowledge base. One approach would be for Canada to promote the building of a circumpolar centre of excellence on northern science (perhaps focused on climate change).

- the goal concerned with IASC should be strengthened, reflecting an aim to ensure that IASC activities are undertaken in the best interests of the Arctic, perhaps through a revised voting system weighted in favour of the Arctic countries.

- the Canadian Polar Commission might be looked to to help coordinate the distribution of resources for Canada's northern scientific research.

SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

- the introduction of this theme should make clearer that it is military security that is being discussed, particularly given that the concepts of environmental, economic, social and cultural security are to be employed in the policy paper.

- the introduction should include a discussion of the changing security picture in the circumpolar Arctic, taking into account global issues influencing this picture (ie. the current state and future prospects for nuclear force reductions). This should include mention of ongoing American discussions of an anti-missile defence system, and note any potential implications or impacts for the Canadian and circumpolar north. The widely held wish of northern Canadians not to see a renewal of military competition in the Arctic needs to be noted, and reconciled with overall Canadian government policies on these questions.

- support was expressed for making a nuclear-free north a goal of Canada's northern foreign policy.

- the introduction's discussion of sovereignty should be expanded to take into account the complexities and limitations the concept faces in a period of increasing global inter-dependence.

- the introduction's discussion of sovereignty also needs to address the issue of land claims and aboriginal self-government, and make the point that these do not comprise a challenge to national sovereignty. This discussion needs to address the right to protection and control of land. As such, the issue of sovereignty should be discussed in terms of stewardship. Perhaps this stewardship perspective should be reflected in the title of this section.

- acquisition of a Polar 8 icebreaker should be a goal under the sovereignty theme. Canada is forsaking this role, yet it would provide both practical and important symbolic benefits.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

- the introduction of this theme should make clear that the growing web of multilateral institutions in the Arctic has not and should not replace strong bilateral relations between Canada and its circumpolar neighbours, and that Canada has an interest in strengthening these bilateral relations as a complement to multilateral activities.

- the objective concerned with bilateral relations with Russia should be strengthened, and made a more prominent element of Canada's overall northern foreign policy. This northern component should be related more clearly to Canada's overall relations with Russia.

- Canada should identify a niche for its bilateral assistance to Russia, filling gaps have been left by others, or where there is special value-added for Canada (ie. waste management/disposal technology). Perhaps it should focus more on the northeastern part of Russia, where European activity is less. The bilateral northern assistance component of the relationship with Russia should be broad in scope, and include a strong humanitarian component.

- a major thrust of Canada's policies toward northern Russia should be fostering of civil society, developing the market economy, and prevention of environmental disasters.

- provision of assistance to Russia through Canadian NGOs has a salutary effect of gaining them access to areas where they can promote civil society and democratic development.

- problems created for Canada by Russia's collapsing north must be confronted frankly (ie. its dumping of nickel and other resources on the international market).

- getting Russia to sign the POPs protocol should be added as a goal under the section on bilateral relations with Russia.

- making better use of the Global Environmental Facility and other international funding sources to undertake environmental projects in Russia should be made a goal under this section.

- developing a trade/aid strategy designed to help Russia take environmental action should be considered as a goal under bilateral relations with Russia.

- the section on bilateral relations with the United States should cover the issue of cooperation through NORAD.

THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

- the discussion of this theme should include a definition of consultation, and it could be productive to refer to land claims agreements and recent legal decisions for this definition.

- it must be conveyed that the consultation process being committed to in the policy not be consultation for its own sake but rather be meaningful and credible.

- there should be attention paid to what kinds of issues may usefully be consulted on.

- care should be taken to ensure that all sectors are adequately represented in the consultative process (business and labour tend to be under-represented).

- strengthening awareness of the north, northern issues and Canadian circumpolar interests and activities among all Canadians is a vital objective of the consultative process.

- the goals under this theme concerned with helping northerners prepare for consultations and with developing northern foreign policy specialists require more resources.

PRIORITY-SETTING

- it was considered to be quite appropriate for the new policy to encompass the full range of Canada's northern foreign policy interests, as reflected in the extensive list of policy goals. The only way to create a living document that will have a long shelf-life is for it to be inclusive. For this reason, there should not be an effort to set priorities among the various goals in the policy document itself.

- however, it was also felt that Ministers must be presented with a manageable number of priorities. This could be accommodated by presenting priorities in a parallel document or some other manner that would not require narrowing the breadth of the policy itself.

- it also needs to be acknowledged that the resources needed to implement the full range of goals will not be available, certainly not all at once. For this reason as well, the policy itself must encompass the full range of goals while making clear the need to establish priorities at the operational level.

- many of the goals contained in the *Goals Paper* are already being pursued under existing government programs. This fact needs to be reflected in the policy document.

- in undertaking the northern foreign policy initiative, the Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated that the new policy should go beyond what was contained in the Government response to the Standing Committee's report. This needs to be reflected in the policy document.

- the *Consultation Paper* and *Goals Paper* need to be reviewed to weed out any objectives or goals that do not deal with issues with a genuine foreign policy dimension. In doing this, one criterion could be that international action should provide value-added to the advancement of Canada's policy interests and objectives.

ACTIVITIES OF OTHER FOREIGN POLICY ACTORS

- as mentioned earlier, the policy should acknowledge clearly that the federal government is not the only actor actively involved in Canada's international Arctic relations, and clearly affirm the value of the participation of other actors.

- the paper's introduction should include a discussion of the roles of other foreign policy actors (ie. NGOs, corporations, territorial and provincial governments, land claims organizations and aboriginal governments), and of the paradoxical trends of globalization and the growing involvement of local and regional actors in international relations.

- there are some areas where the federal government will have clear responsibility for taking the lead (ie. research on global issues, or where treaty making is involved). Yet even in these areas, civil society has an important role to play in providing impetus for action, and this role should be recognized and affirmed in the policy paper.

- the paper should recognize that other foreign policy actors, ie. territorial and provincial governments, northern aboriginal organizations, will not always have the same objectives or strategies as the federal government, and that there is a need for ongoing dialogue and cooperation.

- in this fast emerging context where state governments have lost their former monopoly over foreign relations, a key element of the new northern foreign policy should be to indicate where the federal government is prepared to assist non-state actors in pursuing agreed national foreign policy objectives.

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW POLICY

- federal government departments involved in the north need to improve cooperation to ensure effective coordination in implementing the new northern foreign policy.

- consideration should be given to creating a domestic forum or process through which key stakeholders in Canada's north can regularly be consulted on northern foreign policy issues.

- there is a need to broaden and deepen the federal government's understanding, support and leadership on northern foreign policy. It is particularly important to expand and improve the level of expertise on northern issues within DFAIT. The problems of amassing northern expertise presented by the foreign service's rotation system, and of providing adequate northern orientation of new officers in the Circumpolar and Aboriginal Affairs Division, should be reviewed.

- the level of federal government representation at important Arctic negotiations such as those dealing with transboundary pollution needs to be raised. On an issue as important to the north as POPs, leadership of the kind accorded the landmines treaty should be provided.

- there should also be greater and more ongoing involvement by parliamentarians in overseeing Canada's northern foreign policy.

- in accordance with the government's concern with results management, standards need to be established against which to measure performance in the implementation of Canada's new northern foreign policy. Particular attention needs to be paid to monitoring results at the local level in the north. Also, timing for achieving goals should not be indeterminate, but rather connected with timelines. Transparency should be built into the accountability process.

- the federal Department of Finance exerts strong influence on the business development and investment climate in the north. Its involvement in the policy development process, and its support for the objectives of the new northern foreign policy, should be sought.

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